

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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BUSH ADMINISTRATION GOES PUBLIC WITH EFFORT TO KILL DIRTY BOMB RESPONSE PROGRAM

Markey urges appropriators to deny request

WASHINGTON, DC - Representative Edward Markey (D-MA), a Senior Member of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security and the House Energy and Commerce Committee today issued the following statement on the Department of Homeland Security's admission that it has been secretly trying to kill the Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS), a program to coordinate U.S. cities' response to terrorist dirty bomb attacks. Rep. Markey also released a letter to the House Homeland Security Appropriations subcommittee urging the rejection of the program's termination.

"Terrorist dirty bombs are a very real threat," said Rep. Markey. "The Metropolitan Medical Response System helps local first responders prepare to deal with dirty bomb attacks in 124 U.S. cities in 43 states, including Boston, Worcester and Springfield. After I discovered last month that the Administration was secretly trying to eliminate this program, I sent a letter to Secretary Tom Ridge denouncing this decision and the covert fashion in which it was being carried out. In response, DHS admitted its effort to kill the program in a request letter sent to Congressional appropriators."

MMRS was established in the wake of the terrorist release of sarin nerve gas in a Tokyo subway in 1995. The program provides funds to municipal authorities to coordinate local first responders in reacting to terrorist WMD events, including biological, chemical and radiological (dirty bomb) attacks. On March 24, 2004, DHS Under Secretary Michael Brown testified before the House Appropriations Homeland Security subcommittee that MMRS funds would be expended as appropriated even though on March 19, 2004, the Director of the Preparedness Division at DHS was privately instructed to "redirect" 80% of MMRS' FY2004 funds to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). In a March 29, 2004 letter, Rep. Markey reminded Secretary Ridge that by law, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees must be notified 15 days in advance of any significant reprogramming of these funds. In response, DHS Under Secretary Janet Hale sent a reprogramming request letter to the Committees on April 29, 2004.

Rep. Markey concluded, "We know that al Qaeda is seeking radioactive materials for a dirty bomb in North America, and that hundreds of radioactive sources have been lost or stolen in the U.S. over the past five years. Along with efforts to prevent terrorists from getting dirty bomb materials, we must help prepare local first responders to deal with dirty bomb attacks. The secret attempt to kill this program is another instance of the Bush Administration ignoring hometown security. I urge the Congressional appropriators to reject this request."

Additional information is available at Rep. Markey's website, <http://www.house.gov/markey>.

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